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Spy Philby's Double Life

A Masterpiece Of Deceit

Almost five years ago a high-ranking professional diplomat in Britain's civil service startled his government and the world by defecting to Moscow. This was a man who had headed the Soviet section of Britain's intelligence service during World War II, and served as the link between this service and the American Central Intelligence Agency. Only gradually in the years that have followed have the details of the amazing double-life lifetime of Harold Philby come to light. Here's how some of it now pieces together.

Beacon Journal-Washington Post

LONDON — Harold "Kim" Philby's achievement in becoming head of the Soviet section of the British Secret Intelligence Service, while himself being a Soviet agent, must rank as one of the great professional coups in the twisted history of espionage.

Philby later went on to higher things when he became the linkman between the SIS and U. S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), from which position he could give his Soviet spymasters

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thorough general knowledge of both the major Western intelligence agencies.

BUT there is a classic quality about the earlier achievement. The selection in 1944 of Philby, already a Soviet agent of more than ten years' standing, as the man to conceive, build, and control a new British operation against the Russians is an event embodying the purest essence of espionage.

How was Philby able to do it?

First, he was superbly equipped for the role of spy: His marksmanship was excellent, his mind was swift and clear, his nerves were strong. Despite some powerful drinking, he remained physically tough and resilient. He was also extremely attractive to women.

But above these qualities Philby had the capacity to disguise his feelings and intentions, a crucial professional attribute of a spy. For 30 years he lived as a passionate Communist behind the facade of a middle-class Englishman with liberal-to-conservative opinions.

IT IS still almost impossible to find the chinks in the mask that Kim Philby first put on when he was 22. There are one or two clues: His writing was careful and restrained, and many people who knew him recall an elusive sense of distance or remoteness. Rarely did he allow himself to be engaged in such a way to reveal his inner thoughts.

Had Philby been forced to spend more time in first-class intellectual company during

those 30 years, it is questionable whether he could have kept up the charade. But the ineptitude of the British Intelligence Service helped to make his fantastic career possible.

Because the SIS bureaucracy was protected by layers of official mystery, the agency was even less prepared than others in the British establishment to cope with the mid-20th century. The Service was a caricature of the establishment, and so this is an account of a great breach that opened up the defenses of a social class, and therefore the defenses of the nation.

PHILBY was born on New Year's Day, 1912, in imperial India. Ironically, young Philby's Indian playmates nicknamed him "Kim," after the half-caste boy of the Kipling book whose central theme is intelligence work.

The boy's father, Harry St. John Bridger Philby, was an officer of the Indian civil service, a distinguished Arabist, who, though he came of middle-class background, rejected its ordered virtues for the passionate, egotistic culture of the Arabian deserts. St. John Philby, like T. E. Lawrence, fought to free the Arab lands from the Turkish rule and later came to share the Arab belief that Britain reneged on her promises at the end of World War I.

IN 1929 Kim Philby entered Cambridge, where he met Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean. Philby's political bent was steadily leftwards. His views were expressed more in private, although with great conviction.

Philby had traveled in Central and Eastern Europe during university vacations, and after graduation in 1933 he went for an extended stay to Germany and Austria. It was here and then in the early day of the Nazi terror, that Philby's resolve was hardened. He became a determined Communist, and he was recruited as an agent.

A FEW months after he left Cambridge, Philby was given his lifetime task — to penetrate British intelligence, piece of objective evidence available points to this period in late 1933, and is corroborated by the accounts Philby has given to his children, who have visited him in Moscow since his defection from Beirut in 1963.

On Feb. 23, 1934, Philby married an Austrian Jewish girl, Alice Friedmann, in Vienna. She was an avowed Communist, and now lives in East Berlin with her third husband.

Philby and Alice returned to London, where he became an assistant editor on a dying liberal magazine. But Philby was to spend the next five years carefully obscuring his left-wing past beneath a right-wing camouflage.

an excellent way to insulate oneself against charges of Communism was to condone Hitler's Nazi regime, which both Philby and Burgess did by joining the Anglo-German Fellowship. Philby managed to have his picture taken at a Swastika-decked dinner. This was in 1936, just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, which gave Philby another opportunity to establish his public political position.

Philby went to Spain in February, 1937, and began reporting as a free-lance writer from the Franco side.

Recently in Moscow, Philby told his son John: "I wouldn't have lasted a week in Spain without behaving like a Fascist." He behaved so well, in fact, that General Franco awarded him the Red Cross of Military Merit.

WHEN the civil war ended, Philby had completed two years as an undercover Communist in Franco's camp and returned to London.

When the British Expeditionary Force left for France to fight the Germans, Kim Philby went with them as the London Times' No. 1 war correspondent. His colleague,

Bob Cooper, thought Philby a wild, slightly drunken and rather brutal young man. Kim, it seems, was addicted to a curious bar game which

Franco gave him a top Fascist medal

involved busting people's knuckles.

Other colleagues still saw him as slightly pro-Fascist. He wore the Franco decoration on his uniform.

The disaster of Dunkirk in June, 1940, brought Philby back to London. At last conditions were ready for his crucial penetration of British intelligence.

These conditions were nowhere better than at the house where young intelli-

gence officers set up residence. Among them were Guy Burgess and a number of homosexuals, heavy drinkers and hangers-on of varying types.

PHILBY was immediately taken into the department for sabotage, subversion and propaganda. His particular job was lecturing on propaganda leaflet technique. Philby was later transferred to a unit training for unarmed combat behind enemy lines, but his stammer and the fact that his work in Spain had made him known to a great many German military people made it seem suicidal to send him into occupied Europe.

So in the Summer of 1941 Philby was recruited for work in the Secret Intelligence Service.

This agency, better known as MI-6, was and is concerned with espionage and counter-espionage in foreign countries. (MI-5, the home unit of the mythical James Bond, concerns itself with counter-espionage in Britain and the colonies). Both agencies had suffered a severe contraction since the palmy days of World War I.

PHILBY became part of Section Five of MI-6, which was responsible for counter-espionage, or more exactly, spying on the German spies. Through personal contact supplied by his old colleague Guy Burgess, Philby became head of the Iberian subsection.

The Iberian subsection's theater was a vital one. Spain was a neutral, friendly to Germany, and provided the perfect base for operations against British communications key stone, Gibraltar. Portugal was friendly to Britain, but Portuguese Mozambique was the center of the

'You didn't just like him--you worshiped him'

German espionage operations in southern Africa. It was in this connection that Philby sent Malcolm Muggeridge to Lourenco Marques and Graham Greene to Sierra Leone.

AS A boss, Philby was a quick success. He possessed both grasp and human sympathy, faculties which evidently won him intense loyalty. This was to be a feature of his entire career, and it is with an almost unspeakable sense of irony that associates recall the word which they always felt summed him up: "integrity."

"You didn't just like him, admire him, agree with him," says one man who saw him often from the war until his defection. "You worshiped him."

By 1943, two years after coming in, Philby was firmly established as one of Menzies' very best men.

(Sir Stewart Menzies was chief of the MI-6 section until 1951).

BUT by early 1944, Philby was getting bored by the limitations of the Iberian subsection.

It was then that Menzies asked Philby, just a few months before D-Day, to revive the defunct counter-espionage operation against the Soviet Union. To Philby, this must have seemed the ultimate opportunity, and also to represent the ultimate folly of the men above him.

Philby's appointment is a measure of the blind faith in him on the part of his superiors, whose own reputations had been aided by Philby's work.

The aging colonel who was the sole incumbent of the inactive Soviet section was pensioned off, and Philby moved in to build an empire which, within 18 months, occupied an entire floor and employed more than 100 people.

WITHIN two years, the section had accumulated a vast store of information on Communists in Western countries, front organizations and the other now-familiar stuff of cold war counter-espionage. And Kim Philby had acquired the confidence of his staff.

"He could get them to do anything for him," one of them has recalled.

This witness remembers that everyone there came from a strict security background, where the rigid tradition was that office desks should be locked at night. But Kim broke that tradition as he broke so many others. "Don't worry about that," he said, "I'll lock them up later."

"I didn't like to do it," this witness now says, "but he was so charming that I couldn't refuse anything he asked."